

N^o 4

The Account to be shortly given of our
STEWARDSHIP,

Considered in a

S E R M O N

Preached at

GRAVEL-LANE,

I N

S O U T H W A R K,

January 1. 1728-9.

For the Benefit of the CHARITY-SCHOOL
kept there.

By JOHN EVANS, D.D. K

Published at the Request of the Managers.

L O N D O N : Ⓜ

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LUKE XVI. ~~1~~2. latter part.

*Give an account of thy stewardship;
for thou mayst be no longer steward.*

THE particular service of the day, joined with the time of it, at the commencement of a new year, have made this subject to appear to me not improper for our present meditation.

Possibly it may appear the more suitable, if we consider the Scope of our Saviour in this chapter; which is, to excite men to use this world, and to manage their concerns in it, with an eye to the other world, and to the promoting of their everlasting interests there. For this end, the chapter is mainly employed in delivering *two* instructive and moving parables; this of *the unfaithful steward*, and the other of *the rich man and Lazarus*.

The design of the former, of which our present subject makes a part, is to teach us, that we should not look upon ourselves as absolute proprietors of the advantages and bounties of Providence which we enjoy in the present life, but rather as stewards intrusted by God the sovereign proprietor, and accountable to him for the use of them. That our well or ill-being for ever depends upon the use we make of the talents committed to us, in time.

And therefore, that it highly concerns us, as a point of most indisputable wisdom, to employ them in the greatest subservience we can to our final happiness after death. We should be as diligent and careful in using our present advantages for the honour of God, and the good of mankind, in order to promote our everlasting welfare, which we profess to make our main design; as worldly men, who have their chosen portion here, are in laying them out to the greatest temporal profit, in making friends, and securing their other secular interests.

Christ delivers these instructions, 1st. By proposing the similitude of a rich man and his steward, and the politick management of the steward for his worldly interest. 2^{dly}. By recommending like policy to men for their spiritual and eternal interests, with that which the steward shewed for his temporal; with an observation as the ground of the recommendation, that worldly men are commonly wiser in their way, or in pursuing the happiness which they have chosen, than those who profess to seek a heavenly happiness, are in their way, *ver.* 8. And, 3^{dly}. By a more direct application of the parable, wherein he more plainly presses upon men their duty, and variously enforces it, *ver.* 9, — 12.

The similitude itself is well worthy of notice. Here is supposed a rich man, possessed of a plentiful estate. He kept a steward, whom he entrusted with the care of his affairs. After some time, the master discovered, that his steward had acted dishonestly, by

bezzeling and misapplying some part of his
 ods. The steward was charged with this
 me, ordered to make up his accounts, and
 quainted that he must quit his place. Thus
 the representation is suited to us all; and
 believe was intended as what will at one
 or other be said to every man, *Give an
 account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be
 no longer steward.*

And this I offer to present serious confide-
 rence, that e'er long such a summons as this
 will be the language of Providence to us all,
 we hear it no otherwise. And it contains
 some important admonitions, fit to be carried
 along with us thro' every day, and in every de-
 cerning action of our lives.

I. That whatever we have, or are, we should
 consider ourselves as *stewards*, and no more.

II. That our stewardship will soon come to
 an end.

III. That when it is ended, we must give
 an account of it.

I. Whatever we have, or are, we should
 consider ourselves as *stewards*, and no more.
 This must be said of us, in reference to all our
 faculties, either of body or mind, to our time
 and interest; our reputation or friendships, or
 assistance, our opportunities for doing or re-
 ceiving good; whatever they may be, or what
 proportion soever they bear to the share which
 others have of the same things; whether our
 share

share be less or more, we should look upon
as a stewardship. That is,

1. We are not absolute proprietors, but
trusted by God with what we have. We
ever claim of property we may justly pre-
to, in opposition to our fellow-creatures
which would make it highly injurious in the
to deprive us of it; we can have no claim
against God. He is our sovereign *owner*; and
we are more stupid than the brute creature
if we know and acknowledge him not
such, *Isai. i. 3.* or if we should pretend to
cept any thing belonging to us from his su-
rior claim.

There are but two ways, that I know
for arriving at property: One is by perfect
acquisition: The other by the absolute gift
and conveyance of a thing to us by one who
had the property in it before. But neither
are we absolute proprietors of any thing in the
spect of God.

All we have, and are, is not ours by nat-
ural acquisition, but by the gift of God. Our
natural capacities and powers are such as
Author of our nature hath bestowed upon
wherein we had no hand or concern ourselves.
And for all the other distinctions which
be remarkable in us from other people, either
improvements of mind, or the circumstances
of our outward condition; possibly a diligent
use of proper means, on our part, may have
contributed to them: Yet I hope we believe
that we are much more beholding to the pro-
vidence and blessing of God, without which
all our own endeavours would have been

Hed and disappointed. *He makes us to dif-*
from another; and, we have nothing which
have not received. 1 Cor. iv. 7. *He giveth*
dom and knowledge. Eccl. ii. 26. *He in-*
sted the husbandman to discretion, and guides
 in the several ways and businesses of life,
 the opportunities and occasions of improv-
 their skill, and by his common influence
 ceeds them to the obtaining of it. And
 en men have obtained the most promising
 iture, and taken the most prudent steps,
 must depend upon the same good pro-
 vidence of God, to obtain thereby either re-
 ation, or interest, or friends, or honour,
 estate. This is very obvious from every
 s experience; and remarked of old by
 mon, Eccl. ix. 11. *The race is not [al-*
is] to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,
ber yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to
of understanding, nor yet favour to men of
 How often do we see men who push
 honour, and, by the tendency of second
 es, one would think bid fair for it, yet
 e miss of their aim, as an evidence that a
 et Providence *withholds* some from honour,
 said particularly of Balaam, Numb. xxiv. 11.
 this, others who attain to honour, should
 made sensible, that *God pulleth down one, and*
th up another. The blessing of the Lord,
 well as *the Hand of the diligent, maketh*
 Prov. x. 4, 22. *He giveth corn, and*
e, and oil, and multiplieth silver, where
 enjoy these things, *Hof. ii. 8.* I appre-
 d most people, who observe the course of
 gs, either with themselves or others, must
 be

be sensible of this; that beside the common blessing of Providence, which is fit to be acknowledged when it comes in the most ordinary way, most people have been beholding to some *extraordinary incidents* of Providence, for the most remarkable successes they have had, either in advancing their worldly circumstances, or in raising them up friends, or in making them a way to reputation; which incidents they have contributed little to themselves. The sum is this; God is principally to be considered as the giver of a share of worldly good that we enjoy. As the same observation holds true concerning the means of grace. God, in his sovereign Providence, puts these prizes into the hands of one people, when he withholds them from another, and affords them in a more plentiful measure to some than to others. Whosoever partakes of them, ought to receive them as the free gift of God; for nothing is our property, merely by our own acquisition.

Nor yet have we a property conferred on us by an absolute grant from God the supreme proprietor. *The earth hath he given to the children of men*, Psalm cxvi. 15. but not as to alienate his own right. Still *the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof*. He has only given it to us as *usufructuaries*. He has given men dominion over the works of his hands in this lower world, but only as stewards under him. And for every particular of his bounty and grace, relating either to his love or godliness, God retains the property; we have them only lodged in their hands for use.

his is most evident, because he ever retains the right to resume any or all of them; and often exercises that right, either upon forfeiture, or at sovereign pleasure.

We are then to consider ourselves, not as having absolute property in any thing, but as trusted by God with whatever we have. Therefore,

2. We are obliged, as stewards, to make the honour and interest of our Master our main hope and end, in the use of all. A steward cannot approve himself faithful to his trust, if he make the aggrandizing of himself, and the promotion of his own interest, the governing end of his conduct and management. Indeed, as to our greatest interest, that stands inseparably connected with our duty to God: and we are allowed, and even commanded, to unite it in our view and design, with our regard to our Master; as the following part of the parable plainly shews. That which is knavery in the steward here represented, will be fully consistent with our duty as stewards of our heavenly Master's goods; that is, to use them for our own best profit and advantage. An earthly lord and his steward have different interests; and therefore if such a steward convert his master's goods to his own advantage, he must so far wrong his master. But God hath graciously united his glory and our true happiness, into one interest; so that we cannot more effectually employ the talents with which we are entrusted for God's honour, than by using them to our own highest advantage; nor better secure our

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own happiness, than by designing to promote God's honour and interest.

But yet still there is place for attending this part of the plain duty of a steward, supreme regard to our Master's honour and interest. This should explicitly be made our aim in our whole course, as well as a regard even to our best and final interests. And in the case of our temporal interests, they must not interfere with God's; and then, in competition with his, they should be laid in the dust and cheerfully sacrificed to his superior interest, if they interfere with it. Our honour and reputation, our ease and quiet, our friendships and worldly enjoyments, and even life itself, should be of small esteem with us, compared with the much nobler end of honouring God, and promoting his cause. And in the use of all our talents, we are not to consult self-pleasing or self-interest of any kind for this world, as our main aim; but more how we may most effectually consecrate all we have, or are, to God; how we may most successfully employ our capacities and endowments in his service; how we may best honour him with our substance. *Holiness to the Lord, should be written upon our merchandise, and our hire.* It should be our study, how we may fill up our time most to the credit of religion, in the service of God and our generation; how we may most advance our profession, and win others by our conversation to glorify our Father in heaven. This is the meaning of the Apostle's exhortation, *Phil. iv. 8. Whatsoever things are true*

whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things. This is also the sense of that general precept, 1 Cor. x. 31. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* And this is the intention of the general character which the Apostle gives of all genuine Christians, 1 Cor. xiv. 7, 8. *None of us liveth to himself, no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*

3. We are engaged, as stewards, to conduct ourselves in the use of all we are intrusted with, by the significations of our Master's command, and not by our own will and pleasure. A steward ought to make it his general rule to serve his master's interest, according to the best of his apprehension; so where the master signifies his pleasure, he must pursue the course prescribed to him by the proprietor. Such is our obligation to our Master in heaven; only much stronger than we are in to any master on earth. An earthly lord may mistake his own interest, and in some cases not understand it so well as his steward: In such a circumstance, it is not becoming a steward, modestly to debate the orders of his master; tho' he must acquiesce at last, if he cannot convince him. In our case it is quite otherwise. The best direction we can have, not only how to please

God, but how to honour him; must be received from himself, from the prescription of his infinite wisdom.

He hath inlaid many notices of his mind in the reason and natural conscience of men; and in his word he hath given particular directions, how we ought to use most of the talents committed to us. At least, he hath given general directions for all; which if they are carefully attended to, will be sufficient to regulate our conduct in the various circumstances and events thro' which we pass. Now our business is, to use upright endeavours for knowing his mind in every case, and then to act accordingly. Obedience is better than sacrifice, that we follow his direction in the use of his own gifts; as become those who are stewards, and not proprietors.

I proceed to a second instruction intimated in the text.

II. Our stewardship will soon come to an end. One man indeed cannot say to another as in the text, *Thou mayest be no longer steward*; thy stewardship is out this moment. But we may all say the following things to ourselves, and one to another, with the greatest truth.

1. The longest continuance of our stewardship possible, is only during the present life. And that is but short, at the longest. *Behold, the time is short*, 1 Cor. vii. 29. Short compared with the past duration of the world we are in; but infinitely more, compared with eternity. It is short, considering the

various

variety of work we have to do in it, for the
 service of God, the benefit of our genera-
 tion, and the salvation of our own souls. In
 these views we have but a little time to live,
 so' we should reach to threescore years and
 four, or by reason of strength to fourscore,
 even if we should arrive at the age of
 Methuselah. Now this short time of life is
 the utmost period of our stewardship. All
 the enjoyments of life, which are the trust
 committed to us, must end with it: For we
 brought nothing into this world, and it is cer-
 tain that we can carry nothing out. 1 Tim. vi. 7.
 Your riches, your honour, your influence,
 which make you capable of doing good; and
 your opportunities of reading and hearing,
 and meditating on the overtures of the gos-
 pel, by which you are capable of receiving
 it, will be no longer in your possession, as
 soon as soul and body are separated: And tho'
 the natural capacities of your minds will still
 remain, that will no longer be in a way of
 assistance in order to an account and a recom-
 pence. We may all say with our Master,
 John ix. 4. *I must work the works of him that
 sent me, while it is day; for the night cometh,
 wherein no man can work.* Therefore the ad-
 vice of Solomon is founded on the highest rea-
 son, Eccl. ix. 10. *Whatever thy hand findeth
 to do, do it with thy might; for there is no
 work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in
 the grave, whither thou goest.*
 2. We may be put out of many parts of
 our stewardship before death. As God always
 retains a right to resume his own gifts, so he
 often

often calls for them from men while they are by the way. How often, how easily, are men deprived of the use of their rational capacities, while they continue to sojourn in the body ! Is it an uncommon thing for riches to *take themselves wings, and to fly away like an eagle towards heaven* ? The means of grace may be withdrawn, or continued with less advantage and power than formerly. Even our capacity may be greatly infeeblled and blinded by age, if we should live to declining years. And by any of these circumstances we may be rendered incapable of acting to so good purpose for God, for our souls, or for our fellow creatures, as formerly we might have done.

3. The end of our stewardship may, as we ought we know, be *very soon*. However secure we may seem now to be, of any enjoyment, it would be great imprudence absolutely to depend upon it. A man may be near to a fall from the pinnacle of honour, when he is arrived at the top ; as in the case of *Haman*. Your substance may be greatly enlarged, and yet suddenly swept away ; as in the case of *Job*. 'The vigour of parts, and furniture of usefulness, may be lost on a sudden ; and the greatest strength of bodily constitution be reduced to a most languishing state, by an unexpected distemper. 'In the midst of life, we are in death.' Such disorders may now be breeding within our bodily frame, while we least perceive them, that in a little while they may shake and dissolve the earthly house of this tabernacle : Or what to us is a sudden accident may come with a divine commission to

quick into another world. *This year we may die: Or even, this night our soul may be required of us.*

All should impress this thought upon us, that we shall not be long stewards. But then,

III. We must give an account of our stewardship, when it is over. *Give an account of stewardship.*

The nature of the tenure by which we hold, makes an account of it most reasonable to be demanded from us. It would argue weakness and negligence in our Lord and sovereign proprietor, if he should omit it; as it would be esteemed so in an earthly master. Upon this view, the wiser heathens entertained some expectation of a future account.

But we, who enjoy the light of the Gospel, have the most express declarations, that our heavenly Master will herein act worthy of himself.

Every one of us shall give account of himself.

Rom. xiv. 12. *We must all appear before*

judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may

give the things done in his body, according to

as he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Cor. v. 10. And therefore, in every station

is our great concern to behave as they that

must give account, that we may do it with joy,

and not with grief. *Heb. xiii. 17.*

That which makes this thought the more

valuable is, that we must render this account to

our Master. *Every one shall give account of himself*

to God. Rom. xiv. 12. *To God, the judge*

of all. Not to a fallible creature, capable of

being imposed upon; or an incompetent judge

of our talents, or of our sincerity in the use and improvement of them; but to the search of hearts, to the all-comprehending mind, who *will not judge merely according to outward appearance, but will judge righteous judgment.* Not to a person with whom we have no concern, who officiously intermeddles with things out of his province, and who is only a fellow-servant with us; but to our Lord and Master, whose we are, and who hath authority and power to oblige us to answer his claim.

This account will also be demanded in proportion to our trust. *According to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* Which at once shews the equity and the reasonableness of the account. *To whom much is given of him shall be much required; and to whom little is committed, of him the less will be asked.* Luke xii. 48. An encouragement to the hearts of every upright mind, tho' he hath but a few talents; but a thought fit to be laid to heart by all those who have more and greater talents, that they may not rest satisfied without being useful, according to their higher capacity.

It must be added, that this account will be given in order to everlasting rewards and punishments. The issue of the account, in case of unfaithfulness, will not merely be like that of the steward and represented in the parable, to be turned out of his master's service for misdemeanour. But the unfaithful steward *shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.* Matth. xxv. 46. The wicked and slothful servant, and the unprofitable servant, will be condemned, ver. 26, 30. And among the

are prevailingly good, a proportion will be observed in the reward. 2 Cor. ix. 6. *He which soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully.*

conclude with some reflections.

We, who are but stewards, have no reason to murmur, if others are intrusted with more than we; or if some talents are withdrawn which once were committed to us. Instead of that, we have a just foundation for thankfulness, how little soever it be, that we have done so much for our share, and that we have enjoyed it so long. *For shall not God do what he will with his own?* May he not, when he sees, call in what he has but lent us? And the less we have, the less we are accountable

We, who are but stewards of all, should not imagine that God is beholden to us; or that we may pretend to merit, tho' we should make use of so good an improvement of any of the advantages we possess. If we have done all that is commanded us, we must say, *we are but profitable servants; we have done no more than our duty to do.* Luke xvii. 10. Why should we boast, as if we had not received? Should we not rather say with David, 1 Chr. x. 14. *All things come of thee, and of thine have we given thee.* Or, as in ver. 16. *this store, which we have prepared to build an house, cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own!* We are in no capacity of serving in any way, but with the enjoyments and

the powers which he hath given us; and should never have made a right use of them without the addition of his grace to form to a right disposition.

3. We, who are stewards, but liable to be turned out at pleasure, should know our trust and discharge our trust, while it is in our hands. It will not prevent an uncomfortable account, if hereafter we should be incapacitated for a particular service to God or our generation, as long as we once had it in the power of our hands, if we had attended to our season. A caution for the future, is one of the things recommended in the stewardship described in the parable; tho' the unjust methods he used in making provision for changing circumstances, are justly to be abhorred. We should work while it is day; and so much the more, as we see our last day approaching; so we may not have our work to do, when the time is out.

4. We, who must give an account to God, should often call ourselves to account, before we have discharged our stewardship hither, where we have been negligent, where we have been unfaithful. That we may endeavor to make accounts even by unfeigned repentance for whatever hath been amiss; which is the grace of the Gospel we have encouragement to hope for, thro' the blood of Christ. For, if we would judge ourselves, we shall not be judged. 1 Cor. xi. 31. And that we may be quickened to greater zeal for time to come: *Knowing the time, that now it is the time to awake out of sleep, for now is our*

tion nearer than when we believed. Rom.

II.

Let it be made the constant business of lives to be ready to give up our account with joy, and not with grief.

To that end, let us make as little work for penitence as we can; and diligently avoid a long and intricate reckoning. It will be our wisdom, frequently to review both our trust, and our discharge of it; that we may exert hearty repentance for whatever we know to be amiss, and humbly plead the great atonement for an actual pardon.

The best habitual preparation, will be a careful attendance to our stewardship, endeavouring to honour God, and obey his will, in the proper use of what he hath committed to us. We should make the best discovery we can, of our own peculiar talents, and our proportion of them; and watch the opportunities and calls given us by Providence, for the use of each, and readily fall in with them. This should be done, not only in the use of the talents, but of all that are put under our management as stewards; and thro' our whole course, our stewardship comes to its conclusion. *Happy is that servant, whom his Lord when he shall find so doing.*

Among the instances of a right discharge of our stewardship, charity and beneficence the necessitous makes one eminent branch; and a branch, which our Saviour had eminently in his eye, in delivering this parable; the application of it in some following verses only signifies. And I dare recommend that

particular sort of charity, to which your contribution is now desired, as a very plain and pressing occasion for your charitable regard. Allow me to lay before you the brief account of it, which hath been put into my hands.

The State of the CHARITY-SCHOOL in Gravel-Lane, Southwark; as it stands, the first day of January, 1728

THE foundation of this school, was in the year 1687. The number of scholars first was forty, afterwards increased to fifty and now to about one hundred. They are taught to read, write, and cypher; and are also instructed in the *Assembly's Catechism*.

It may be said to be the first school the protestant dissenters were concerned in.

Here objects are received without distinction of parties, the general good being intended. It is situated in one of the poorest parts about the city; and the children of the poorest sort of watermen and fishermen are here taught without any expence to their parents.

The charge has been defrayed by the gifts and subscriptions of private persons, together with the annual collection on this day, at the place, and one in the city.

The managers have been enabled to give the children Bibles, Testaments, and Catechisms; and to place some out apprentices to trades; and by the Providence of God favouring them in the trust reposed in them, by the charity of the contributors, and the kind
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embrances of some by legacies given in their wills, have set up another school, under the care of a mistress, for learning about twenty younger children to spell and read, who when fitted, are taken into the master's school, for writing and cyphering, and made ready for trades.

Certainly, a work of this nature speaks for itself, and the bare representation of it should engage your ready assistance.

The rising age cannot fail to be very much the concern of all serious Christians; that God may have an interest in the world when they themselves are dead and gone. And there can be very little hope of the next age, unless the friends of virtue and religion, who are now living upon the stage of life, take some care of the virtuous education of those who are growing up.

The children of the poor cry aloud for the compassionate concern of those who are in better circumstances than their parents. We see the sad effects, where no care is taken to form the minds of such children to the knowledge of God and their duty: They have scarce any principle to restrain them from enormous excesses, or to dispose them to any thing that is good, and hardly any foundation for the word of God to work upon, and too often become the burthens and the plagues of the earth.

The children that are here supported, are such as could have scarce any advantage for mature piety, or to prepare them to be useful members of the community, without this provision.

vision. Some of them deserve the more consideration, for the sake of their parents, who have many of them been diligent and industrious in their time. Some of the children might pretend to the regard of good people for the sake of their own towardsly dispositions, and promising capacities: And for the worst of them, there is the argument of necessity.

Now in reference to this case, I would desire you to consider yourselves as stewards of your substance. If you are intrusted with little, God and man expect but little from you yet your mite may be hoped for. But if you are intrusted with a larger share, your own minds cannot fail to suggest, that a larger proportion may be expected from you for a publick service, which you know requires no small expence.

If you would consider your time of stewardship as short, you would not think much of the returns of such an opportunity as this. You may be in another world, before another new year; or Providence may reduce your worldly circumstances before that time; and the exercise of charity is one of the most likely ways to secure the divine blessing upon what you have: But in case of death or disaster will it not be a real pleasure to you to remember, that you have chearfully embraced opportunities of doing good, while you were able?

And when you look forward to the account can you think that this will not pass well with it, when you remember how Christ represents the process of the great day, in *Matth. xxv*

then out of the characters of the condemned
 the absolved then he singles out only
 an instance, their different respects to him
 his members, either by neglecting to draw
 their bowels to them, or by compassionately
 relieving them?

To conclude. I must suppose you all either
 have had a religious education yourselves,
 or not to have had one. If you have had it,
 you know the worth and benefit of it. If
 you have not, you know the want of such an
 advantage. And therefore shew your love to
 your poor neighbour, by assisting toward the
 instruction of these little ones. Then what
 can you do, on Christ's account to the least of
 his servants, he will take as done unto
 himself.

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